Sacred Journey

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Autumn 2012
vol. 63, no. 4

SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Fellowship In Prayer

encourages and supports
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

and helps bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.

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We welcome submissions of articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience and practice, religious faith or similar topics, as well as prayers and poetry. We look for writing that expresses an individual's personal experience while also conveying a deeper message of universal appeal. Writing must be accessible to people of all traditions. Please include a brief biography and full contact information: name, address, phone numbers and email. Articles should not exceed 1500 words and should be submitted to the editor by email: submissions@sacredjourney.org. If necessary, they may be mailed.

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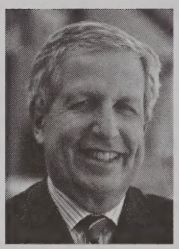
God and the American Election!

DAVID NEWTON



In some 35 years of residing in the United States, I have, adeptly, managed to avoid political discussions and arguments. My excuse has always been that as a British citizen, I am under qualified to offer an opinion. This year however, has been different and I have felt myself being dragged into the political swamp.

My son, William, obtained a job working for the Obama re-election campaign. In early June he was whisked away to that battle ground state of Ohio and has been working, literally, 24/7 on the President's behalf. For my part I was happy that William found employment in an area of work that he enjoys, hoping that this opportunity will lead to a more permanent post-election career in Washington DC.

A few weeks ago a long time friend inquired after the wellbeing of my two boys. I told him about William's posting and I was left speechless as my friend responded: "Doesn't he (William) believe in God?"

The, not-too-subtle, implication from this question is evident. One political party is God fearing and the other represents godless secularists. I was too stunned by the question to give an immediate response, but as the weeks have gone by I have had plenty of time to ruminate on what I should have said.

Lord Sachs, the British Chief Rabbi in reflecting on religious pluralism, once said that our society is made up of groups with very different views and understanding of God but we can all agree that this God of ours loves diversity. Look at all the different types of flora and fauna that exist in nature, look at all the ethnicities that make up our multi-cultural society. Surely in creating the great American melting pot, God is not asking

us to promote a one sided rigid unity but rather aren't we being challenged to strive, through our diversity of ideas and beliefs, to reach for and achieve an optimal result.

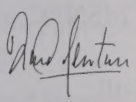
A plethora of different beliefs and positions has to be seen as positive, yet sanctifying those beliefs and not allowing room for divergent views is potentially dangerous. God doesn't need to be sidelined in American politics, but an inflexible, one sided, rigid view of God has the potential of ruining the most unique political system the world has ever known.

In the *Pirkei Avot,* also know as the Ethics of the Fathers, it states: "A debate for the sake of heaven will endure, while a debate not for the sake of heaven will not endure." American democracy with its craving for ideas, dialogue, mutual respect and a small degree of flexibility, will prevail. American democracy with only fixed positions, rhetoric, negativity and rigidity will not prevail.

In answer to my friend "Yes, I believe that William is performing God's work, no matter who wins or loses in November!"

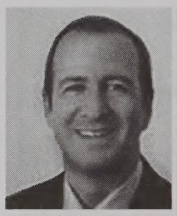
Please enjoy this issue of *Sacred Journey*.

Sincerely,



David Newton

An Interview with Bruce Weinstein



Dr. Bruce Weinstein, better known as The Ethics Guy, is the creator and host of 60-Second Ethics *and is a select contributor to* Bloomberg Businessweek: The Management Blog.

As an in-demand speaker, much of Bruce's work involves assisting business leaders, members of professional trade associations and students of all ages appreciate the role ethics plays in everyday life. This work often takes the form of interactive keynote addresses. His clients have included the National Football League, Northrop Grumman, the Investment Management Consultants Association, the National Business Aviation Association, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and over three hundred other leading groups.

Bruce has appeared on NBC's Today Show*; ABC's* Good Morning America*; a wide range of CNN programs, including* Anderson Cooper 360*; Fox News Channel's* O'Reilly Factor *and* Fox & Friends*; Fox Business Network's* Cavuto*;* MSNBC Live *and CNBC's* Fast Money.

He is the author of several books including Is it Still Cheating if I Don't Get Caught? *and* Ethical Intelligence.

Bruce received a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Swarthmore College, a PhD in philosophy and bioethics from Georgetown University and a National Fellowship in Leadership Development from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. He lives in New York City with his wife Kristen Bancroft. For more information and to take his ethics quiz to discover your ethics IQ, visit www.theethicsguy.com

Fellowship In Prayer: What's the difference between ethics and morality?

Bruce Weinstein: None, historically. In fact, the word "morality" comes from *moralis*, a Latin word that Cicero coined as a translation of the Greek word *ethikos*, which is the origin of the term "ethics." Thus "morality" is to "ethics" what *chapeau* is to "hat" or *caliente* is to "hot."

It's true that many, perhaps most, people make a distinction between morality and ethics, but the problem is that no two people seem to agree about what that distinction is. Test this claim by asking five people you know, "Do you believe there is a difference between ethics and morality? If so, what is that difference?" You'll get responses like these:

- Ethics has to do with social standards; morality is about personal beliefs.
- Ethics comes from secular institutions, whereas morality is a religious phenomenon.
- Ethical judgments are absolute and objective; moral judgments are relative and subjective.

Not only do folks differ about what the distinction between the concepts is; they also differ about how to define each one. Even those who believe there is no difference between ethics and morality may differ over how to define them.

Yes, this sure is confusing. But it doesn't have to be, because just about everyone understands that both ethics and morality have to do with identifying right conduct and good character. To keep everyone on the same page, and to honor the linguistic history of these two noble concepts, it's much better to treat ethical and moral as synonymous.

To what extent do you think ethics are rooted in religious beliefs and practices?

In his valuable book, *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions,* Jeffrey Moses documents how ethical concepts such as respect, justice, and compassion are the bedrock of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and many other religious traditions. But it is a mistake to believe that ethical conduct requires a commitment to a spiritual or religious practice. There are many women and men of conscience who strive to do the right thing every day of their lives but who identify themselves as atheists, agnostics, or secular humanists.

The difference between those who have a religious affiliation and those who do not is how each group answers the question, "Why should I live an ethical life?" Jews, Christians, and Muslims will probably say, "Because God expects it of me." Non-believers may instead respond, "Each person has an inherent dignity and it is incumbent upon me to respect that dignity," or "Society works better when it is founded on ethical principles," or even "I just feel better when I do my best to tell the truth, treat others fairly, and use compassion to guide my decisions."

There are certainly plenty of examples of differences across religions and cultures when it comes to issues directly or tangentially related to ethics. Jews and Muslims believe that it is wrong to eat pork, but this isn't true for many Christians and Jains are required to abstain from eating animals altogether. For Christians and Hindus, human beings have souls, but Buddhists reject this idea (at least insofar as the term "soul" is commonly understood). These differences aren't trivial and they can and do give rise to heated discussions across the traditions, as well as within each one. Is it right for Jewish women to become rabbis, scholars qualified to rule on Jewish law? In Orthodox Judaism, the answer is "no"; in Reform Judaism, it is "yes." Catholics believe it is permissible and even obligatory to receive a blood transfusion if this will save a human life; Jehovah's Witnesses hold that it is wrong to do so. There has never been, and there probably never will be, universal agreement among religious

traditions about precisely how human beings ought to live. The above examples merely show that followers of religious traditions, and the texts upon which their religions are based, have different interpretations of how ethical principles apply in particular instances. The same is true with respect to cultures.

It's also true that history is filled with atrocities committed in the name of God. But the problem is not the religions themselves or their commitment to ethical behavior but the misguided faithful who twist the peaceful messages to meet their own evil objectives. For example, if you and your friend play Scrabble online and your friend cheats when it's her turn by consulting a Scrabble website, who should bear the blame for that—the rules of Scrabble or your friend?

At their most fundamental and meaningful level—the level of principle—religions and cultures alike are committed to the same ethical ideas and ideals. Misguided members of religious communities, and even those who are conscientious, may make ethical blunders, but this doesn't take away from the integrity of the sacred texts themselves and the ethical principles upon which they are founded.

What impact is religion having today in the American political process? How do you think the political process in general could become more ethical?

I don't know about the impact that religion as such is having on the American political process, but for better or worse, religious organizations are playing an increasing role in politics. A study by the Pew Charitable Trust's Forum on Religion & Public Life, (*Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, DC*, November 21, 2011, updated May 15, 2012) revealed that the number of advocacy groups with ties to various faiths has increased fivefold in the past forty years. "These groups collectively employ at least one thousand people in the greater Washington area and spend at least $350 million a

year on efforts to influence national public policy," the report said. Woe to the candidate who does not take heed of such organizations! But when lobbyists wield this kind of power, our democracy is at risk of being sold to the highest bidder. Certainly, businesses, non-profit organizations and trade associations should have a voice in the electoral process. What's troubling is the degree to which these groups are controlling the outcome of elections. Such undue influence is probably a significant reason why the annual Gallup poll about ethics in the professions places politicians near or at the bottom of the list, year after year.

In a multifaith, multicultural world, is there one common basis for ethical behavior?

Yes. As I mentioned earlier, Jeffrey Moses shows how religious traditions all over the world rely upon the same ethical precepts. Of course, those traditions articulate these precepts somewhat differently. For example, the so-called Golden Rule is presented in Judaism as, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others." The Christian version is, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." A third example exists in Brooklyn, where I was born: "Do unto others before they do unto you."

What do you think are the predominant ethical questions that will influence the 2012 election?

There are substantive ethical questions that face voters and there are ethical questions raised by how the campaigns themselves are conducted. In the former category, here are just a few:

- Would a compassionate society make health care available to all, even if there is no legal or moral right to such care?
- Should citizens be free to purchase whatever firearms they wish, in whatever quantity they wish, whenever they want to?

- Is it fair to expect citizens who earn more to pay more in taxes?

These questions have legal implications, of course, but they are fundamentally ethical ones. Whenever we ask, "What's the right thing to do?" and our decision can affect the rights or well being of others, we're asking an ethical question.

With respect to ethical issues surrounding the race to the White House, one thinks of the following questions:

- Is there an ethical obligation to be truthful in stump speeches, advertisements and other aspects of each candidate's campaign?
- Should the candidates refrain from placing negative ads, or do the ends justify the means?
- Do citizens have a right to expect the candidates to keep the pledges they make during their campaigns? What should the penalties be if and when the winner fails to keep their promises?

Many people, unhappy with both presidential candidates, decide not to exercise their right to vote at all. Do you view this decision as ethical or not, and why?

I understand why some folks choose to abstain from voting. With so much corruption in the system, particularly in the role that corporations and lobbyists are playing in the political process, it's easy to see why citizens would be skeptical or cynical about the degree to which they can make a difference. Also, the older one gets, the more often one sees promises made and broken, so isn't it naïve to think that the results of this election will be any different from the ones in the past?

The problem with dropping out is that it's a lazy, unhelpful response to a complex problem. You may not be able to prompt the social changes you seek by voting, but if you opt out of the system entirely, your chances of making a positive impact on society are compromised even more. For example, consider the

issue of the next appointment to the US Supreme Court. As we've seen by the recent decision about the Affordable Care Act, a single Justice can make the difference between whether a law is ruled to be constitutional or not. If you don't vote, and the candidate you oppose is elected, his appointment(s) to the Court could result in decisions you believe are wrong, and those decisions may have far-reaching effects.

From your perspective, are personal attacks or less-than-honest assertions in political advertising evidence of a lack of ethics or fair game?

Dishonesty in politics or anywhere else is unethical by definition, since telling the truth is a fundamental ethical obligation. There are limits to this obligation, of course, but generally speaking, honesty is ethically required.

Regarding personal attacks in advertisements, *ad hominem* arguments aren't really arguments at all. Suppose you claim that the right to purchase firearms should be restricted because the carnage at places like Columbine, Virginia Tech and Aurora could have been reduced or prevented by making it more difficult for people to buy guns and ammunition. If in response, I tell you, "You're simply a dankish, shard-borne pumpion," my Shakespearean-era insults may be poetic, but nothing in this personal attack says anything about whether your argument is valid.

The sorts of insults we see in some political ads and "debates" on some cable news programs aren't even as elegant as Mr. Shakespeare's. Their purpose and effect is not to address the truth content of the opponent's positions but simply to hurt another person. Such actions violate the fundamental ethical principle, Do No Harm. Personal attacks are thus both logically unsound and ethically unintelligent. Only an idiot would use them. Oops. Please forgive me for that.

Is it unethical for candidates to spend millions of dollars on campaigning?

Remember the ads for over-the-counter medications that began with an actor saying, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV"? Well, I'm not an attorney, and I don't even play one on TV. In other words, I'm not a legal expert. But it doesn't take an attorney to make a compelling case that the 2010 US Supreme Court decision, Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, is an excellent example of how laws and judicial decisions are not necessarily ethically intelligent.

That ruling removed some of the restrictions regarding how much money corporations can contribute to political campaigns. The bottom line is that, through so-called Super PACs, companies can now donate copious amounts of cash to favored candidates who will then be beholden to those donors. After all, when someone gives you a gift, you feel obligated to return the favor. Or as Hannibal Lecter said, "*Quid pro quo*, Clarice." You scratch my back, and I'll make sure to vote in favor of laws that support the outsourcing of back scratcher production to countries with no minimum-wage laws.

The problem is that in a democracy, votes should not be for sale to the highest bidder. They shouldn't be for sale at all. As Justice John Paul Stevens wrote in his dissent, "The difference between selling a vote and selling access is a matter of degree, not kind. And selling access is not qualitatively different from giving special preference to those who spent money on one's behalf."

Politicians are supposed to represent the interests of citizens, first and foremost. Should corporations have a voice in the outcome of an election? Of course. Business is an essential component of our society. But what's troubling is the degree to which businesses have a controlling influence in political campaigns, and the Citizens United decision allows these entities to influence elections as never before.

In your book *Ethical Intelligence*, you identify five basic tenets of ethical conduct; would you share what they are and their impact on our world?

The principles are as follows:

1. Do No Harm
2. Make Things Better
3. Respect Others
4. Be Fair
5. Be Loving

I must add that I can't claim that these principles are my own idea. I've adapted them from the classic work, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* by Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress. I have made two changes. First, I simplified the language so that, for example, the principle of non-maleficence becomes the Do No Harm principle and second, I applied these principles to areas beyond biomedical ethics.

The second endeavor is particularly useful, I think. Because we may not consider the Do No Harm principle as relevant beyond health care. Yet it's hard to imagine a world in which this principle was not essential for all to follow. We would be afraid to leave our homes if we couldn't count on other people restraining whatever hurtful impulses they might have. Do No Harm is a fundamental ethical principle not just for physicians, nurses, pharmacists and dentists but also for you and me.

Those are two brief examples. It would take an entire book to explain exactly how the five principles of ethical intelligence can be applied to everyday life. The good news is that I've written such a book!

Thank you, Bruce, for your ethical contributions. It is very much appreciated.

You're welcome. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to your publication.

Ethical Intelligence: Five Principles for Untangling Your Toughest Problems at Work and Beyond

BY BRUCE WEINSTEIN

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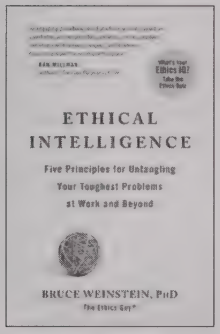


Ethical intelligence may not get as much attention as other forms of knowledge but as Bruce Weinstein shows, it is the most practical, valuable and even courageous form of intelligence—creating a sense of self-worth, determining success on the job and fulfillment in relationships.

The book is filled with many real-life examples of situations which we confront daily making on-the-spot decisions. The author provides guidelines and helpful suggestions that appeals to both head and heart, intellect and spirit.

Ethical Intelligence is the first book that shows how to increase your IQ in every area of your life. Dr. Weinstein applies and reveals the essential elements of a life well lived.

Protecting Religious Freedom is an Urgent Priority for all Democracies: Check Against Delivery

TONY BLAIR

There will be no peace in our world without an understanding of the place of religion within it. This is disconcerting for political and religious leaders. The politicians feel uncomfortable in debating religion (remember 'We don't do God'!). This is off our beaten track of financial crisis, security challenges, healthcare, education and welfare. It pitches us into an unfamiliar realm where we suspect, rightly, many nasty swamps of controversy are located. Religious leaders often have political views and often express them strongly: but they are people of faith driven to talk politics and are not usually participants in a debate about faith itself.

However, the past decade has seen many convenient myths stripped away which had disguised the importance of religion. For many Europeans growing up in the 1960s and 1970s it was believed that as society progressed, religion would decline. It hasn't happened. The global numbers of those espousing a faith has increased even in many nations enjoying strong prospects of development. The projected doubling of the population of the Arab world alone will mean a substantial rise in the numbers of Muslims; and high birth rates in countries such as Indonesia will add to these numbers substantially. Latin America is seeing a big boost to evangelical Christianity. And every year in Italy millions will gather to see and hear the Holy Father, who continues to draw crowds the world over, that dwarf those of any politician.

Since leaving office, I have visited the Middle East

seventy-three times where I see the perils of ignoring the religious dimension to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This dispute is not only about territory. It is about culture and faith and the competing narratives around it. Do we seriously think the issue of Jerusalem can be resolved without at least some discussion of its religious significance to all three Abrahamic traditions? I understand the natural political inclination to say, "Oh it's not really about religion you know, it's really political." But it's simply not true unless we decide for reasons of our own convenience, to ascribe a motivation to people other than the one they say they have, which itself is a weird way to interpret politics.

This is especially so when considering the unpalatable fact that ten years after 9/11, the virus of terror based on a perversion of the proper faith of Islam, shows no signs of abating. It has been present in Iraq and Afghanistan seeking to destabilize those countries' long march to freedom and democracy. It is a daily news item in countries' from India and Pakistan to Nigeria, Somalia and Kenya, to even the far away state of the Philippines. It remains a threat to our own security and has necessitated the spending of countless billions in protection and changes to the way we live. It is a feature of those active in the Israel/Palestine issue.

The challenge is that much greater where human dignity is not respected and freedom of religion is denied. This results in a general oppression of people of faith in several of the central Asian states, in the south Caucasus, and, of course, in North Korea. It means we must support Muslims in Gujarat, India, non-Orthodox Christians in Moldova, Bahai's in Iran, Ahmadis in Pakistan, all Christians in North Africa, Hindus in Sri Lanka and Shi'a in several Sunni majority countries. All have suffered from different forms of discrimination—from persecution and systematic repression, to glass ceilings and harassment.

For some, this is final proof of the iniquity of religious faith. They say the answer is to abandon it completely. Yet, the Pope, in a recent speech on faith, said the perversion of religion and the practice of violence in respect of it, brings forth a different type of aggression, which is a secularism that wants to discredit, even destroy, the very idea of Faith and belief in God.

Maggiore d'Italia together to fight the evil of human trafficking of children and adults.

It is this belief in a higher purpose, God's purpose and this yearning for spiritual as well as material fulfillment that draws people to profess their faith so strongly. Humanity without Faith would be deeply impoverished, even if we materially advanced. Globalization without values

> Power without principle is barren, but principle without power is futile.

Yet this too can be a futile endeavor because for millions of people, faith is not measured in prejudice, intolerance or violence; but in love, compassion, a desire for and striving for a more just and humane world. This—the true face of faith—is what compels the Catholic Church to be so active in the provision of healthcare in Africa, saving countless thousands of lives; or brings the *Unione Superiore* and the sense of equity and justice they bring, often derived from Faith in God, risks producing the very type of crisis we are now witnessing, whose consequences may only just be beginning.

So the time has come to put away the delusions that faith is diminishing; that religion is not really what it's about—that a debate about politics can be seriously conducted in the 21st century

without debating religion. And debating religion not as social science, foreign affairs or even psychology, but truly as religion.

For this to happen, religious, secular and political people need to start talking. As globalization pushes the world together the necessity of finding ways for people of different faiths to coexist peacefully becomes urgent. We need religion-friendly democracy and democracy-friendly religion! Here I offer another way. Those of us inspired by our faith must have the right to speak out on issues that concern us and in the name of beliefs derived from our faith. At the same time our voice cannot predominate over the basic democratic system that functions equally for all, irrespective of their faith or regardless of whether they are of faith at all.

In turn, this should lead to a vital debate about the nature of democracy. Though people of faith do, and should, seek to harmonize their political vision and religious convictions and traditions, I find it hard to define democracy by reference to one particular faith. The essence of democracy is that it is pluralistic, that it treats people of all faiths equally and that it derives its rules from the will of the people. It is inherently secular, even if rooted in cultures that are profoundly religious. This is where democracy-friendly religion really means something very important in the way society is governed.

From this point stems a set of attributes of democracy on which we should insist. Democracy is not just about a system for voting in or out the government. It is not just about the freedom to vote. It is about freedom of expression, freedom of religion and free media. It is also, in my view, about an independent judiciary and the rule of law and even about free markets albeit with appropriate government intervention and regulation. It is, in other words, as much an attribute of mind as much as a technical system of decision making.

This attitude is open-minded; open to the world, to others, to diversity, to

difference. The alternative is the closed mind, those who see globalization only as a threat and who see difference as a danger and diversity as a weakness. The closed mind uses democracy; it doesn't believe in it.

The honoring of religious minority rights and a healthy religious pluralism is a core aspect of democracy and it is a core dimension of the open-minded. Democracy has a check list of government accountability, the electoral possibility of getting rid of a government because a majority of voters are opposed to its policies. Political pluralism and religious pluralism, it seems to me, go together.

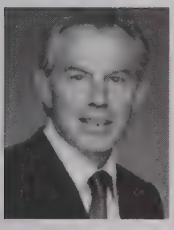
The minds behind the use of religion to justify violence or prejudice are the closed minds. They regard those who do not believe as they do as infidels, outcasts, even those within their own faith that differ from them. Against this closed minded attitude has to be placed an idea of Faith that is open to others: I have my faith, I keep my faith; but I am prepared to respect that you have yours and have an equal right to practice it and believe in it. That is the only way the world can work and democracy can take root. Without this attitude of mind, religion becomes a source of conflict.

This task can't be left only to politics. It has to be undertaken, in part, at least by those of faith. They have to provide the platform of interfaith understanding and respect and the theological and scriptural justification for the open mind. It is here that the designing and embedding of protective constitutional provisions will not be enough. With the best will in the world, they will remain paper aspirations if religious and government leaders do not educate their constituencies in religious minority rights.

Without interfaith understanding, the exclusivist and closed minded attitude is allowed free occupation of the religious space in politics. But this is where I, and others like me in politics, need help. It is where religious leaders must step forward and engage.

Finally, were this to

happen, there would, in my view be one major and positive consequence for faith itself. It would allow those of us of faith to discuss and proclaim what our faith means to us, why Faith and Reason go hand in hand and how we feel faith enriches our lives and guides them. It would open up the potential of faith to many presently searching for spiritual meaning but have come to regard the practice of faith as the preserve of the irrational, the superstitious and the prejudiced. It would allow a true and rational belief in God to direct the path of the 21st century. That is where Faith belongs. And why the world needs it.



Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is founder of the Tony Blair Foundation where he works tirelessly to promote respect and understanding about the worlds major religions and how that can be a powerful force for good in the world. He has received numerous awards in recognition of his work. This article was excerpted and adapted from a speech he gave in Italy on November 10, 2011 and used with permission. www.tonyblairfoundation.org

LET US WITH CAUTION INDULGE THE SUPPOSITION THAT MORALITY CAN BE MAINTAINED WITHOUT RELIGION. REASON AND EXPERIENCE BOTH FORBID US TO EXPECT THAT NATIONAL MORALITY CAN PREVAIL IN EXCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Those who say religion
has nothing to do with politics
do not know what religion is.

MAHATMA GANDHI

The tragedy of religion is partly due to its isolation from life, as if God could be segregated.

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF WE SHALL EVER GROW UP IN OUR POLITICS AND SAY DEFINITE THINGS WHICH MEAN SOMETHING OR WHETHER WE SHALL GO ON USING GENERALITIES TO WHICH EVERYONE CAN SUBSCRIBE, AND WHICH MEAN VERY LITTLE.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

The Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) real political leadership was in the realm of morality and spirituality.

MUZAMMIL H. SIDDIQI

It is true, political problems are not solved by love and mercy. But the world of politics is not the only world and unless political decisions rest on a foundation of something better and higher than politics, they can never do any real good for humankind.

THOMAS MERTON

THE WORD OF GOD HAS SHAPED THE HISTORY OF OUR CULTURE. WE HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER THE WORD "GOD" HAS ANY MEANING FOR US TODAY.

KAREN ARMSTRONG

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Our lives are like a field ready to be planted and then harvested. What we have planted predicts what we will yield.

REV. KATHY NELSON

ETHICS IS NOTHING ELSE THAN REVERENCE FOR LIFE.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Chatting, Politics and Prayer: A Common Thread from the Teachings of Martin Buber

DENNIS S. ROSS

Jewish thinker Martin Buber would probably agree: chatting with a friend can be a lot like praying, even when the conversation turns to politics. But before getting ahead of ourselves, let's turn to an example that explains.

Imagine arriving at the doctor's office for an appointment. It's nothing serious—tennis elbow—but when you check in, the receptionist almost barks, "She's running an hour late," leaving you to take a seat, feeling annoyed—and about to have a sweet surprise.

A moment later, an old friend enters the waiting room, someone you haven't seen for ages. Your friend checks in, receives the same gruff greeting, sits down next to you and the two of you start talking. As the conversation moves along, you get so caught up in the exchange you lose track of everything else, including the passing time, the coming and going of other patients and staff—you even forget why you went to the doctor in the first place. And were Martin Buber to observe this fully engaging conversation, he would likely say that you and your friend entered into an I-Thou relationship, just as he explained in his classic book of religious thought, *I and Thou.*

I and Thou describes the spirituality in our relationships. It explores three fundamentals: The I-It relationship, the I-Thou relationship and the Eternal Thou. First, I-It is in the receptionist's cold, mechanical, "She's running an hour late" greeting. I-It is routine, repetitive, uncaring and impersonal communication that happens during a bad experience at airport security or on a frustrating 1-800 call to the bank. On

the other hand, I-Thou is the totally consuming conversation with the old friend in the waiting room. It sweeps away the sense of time—how long it lasts—space—where it occurs—and cause—what brought you there in the first place. Then we have the fleeting I-Thou with a supermarket cashier or restaurant greeter, a few seconds of back-and-forth between strangers that demonstrates genuine feelings, one for the other. Finally the Eternal Thou, as Buber teaches, is an invisible, unknowable heavenly domain where God gathers in every I-Thou—big and little—forever. It elevates the spirit, bringing a person into a soulful status with Eternal Thou as surely as our prayer does.

Now please don't get me—or more significantly, Buber's teachings—wrong. I-It is an essential part of life. You want the I-It of knowing how long the doctor is delayed—eventually getting to the exam room, you want it in monitoring your blood pressure or tracking medications and potential negative side effects. We very much need the I-It relationship in our daily routines. But when Buber wrote, "All real living is meeting," he wanted us to know that we are really on this earth for one another. Back to my opening point, I-Thou elevates the spirit, just like prayer.

Even though Buber wrote *I and Thou* immediately after WWI, he speaks to our era with the same urgency and impact that he spoke to his. Reacting to a thunderstruck Europe in the aftermath of a devastating war, Buber sought to understand and address the purpose, value and goodness in human life. He believed war originates in estrangements that escalate into heartache and conflict—a very dark kind of I-It relationship. In writing *I and Thou,* he gave us the tools to strengthen and deepen human relationships so that such interpersonal catastrophes never occur again.

He also wrote the book in response to prevalent anti-Semitism and religious bigotry. He sought to showcase the positive essence of Judaism to people of all faiths and background. He hoped that his book would bridge national,

cultural and religious differences that all too often divide.

Finally, he recognized the spiritual compromise in rising technology and the industrial revolution; he acknowledged the dangerous negative side effects of modern advances. Buber lived through the horror of a new and mechanized style of warfare that included the machine gun, more powerful explosives, aerial combat and chemical weapons. His generation marveled at the invention and popularity of cars, planes, telephones and more: innovations bringing speed and efficiency—at a cost to the human spirit. Buber excelled at calling attention to the spiritual challenges inherent in scientific advances, especially through the use of the Hasidic story—tales of European religious leaders known for their piety, study ethic and ecstatic prayer. Many cryptic parables of the Hasidic Masters circulated in his day and he compiled a vast collection. In one parable, the Hasidic Master, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of the small town of Rimanov, reminisced about simpler times, before modern inventions, saying:

> In the days when there were no roads, a person had to end a journey at sunset and spend a night at an inn, where there was plenty of time to meditate, read a book or have a good conversation. But now a person can ride these roads day and night and there is no peace anymore.

In Buber's time as today, our advances—welcome as they are—come at a cost to the spirit. Buber recognized how cars, better roads and street lighting made travel safer, easier and more enjoyable, just as he saw the spiritual risk. Certainly, the challenge remains and even intensifies as electronic communication threatens to commandeer our time and souls, leaving less time for study, thinking and prayer. (All this as I allow my writing to be interrupted by a text message!)

Buber also had much to teach us about the good society and how we go about creating it. I don't know what he—or any

other historic figure would say about politics today—but Buber taught and lived by a social vision that grows from his I-Thou relationship. He fled Europe as the Nazis rose to power, settled in Jerusalem and became a prominent voice for social justice until his death in 1965. He condemned capital punishment to the point of enduring tremendous criticism for publicly speaking against the execution of the convicted Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann. He called for cooperation between the Jews of Israel and their neighbors, joining others to endorse a bi-national Jewish and Arab state. And he affirmed the spiritual dimensions of intimate decision making underlying the I-Thou relationship, which speaks to my work as a religious advocate today. I assume

> "When two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them."
>
> ~Martin Buber

Buber would have compassion for the needs of the woman, who in her soul, decides she must end her pregnancy because she knows it is not right for her. He would likely recognize those who, out of conscience, decide that a same-gender committed relationship is right for them. And he certainly would insist that we discuss these issues in public dialogue marked by respect and dignity.

All too often political conversation today jumps away from the issues into hostile personal attack. Of course, conversations about the destiny of our nation and communities are I-It at heart, and we have a right and responsibility to speak our minds. But we can do much better, as a society as well as individuals, being more respectful of one another when we

do not see eye-to-eye. When it comes to political controversy, Buber would have us conduct clear, honest and open communication, aspiring to I-Thou.

In my work as a congregational rabbi and religious advocate I try to stick to the issues and avoid personal attacks. I try to find something to appreciate in each person I speak with—beginning with gratitude for their time and candor. Such efforts to conduct respectful dialogue stems from Buber's teachings in *I and Thou*. I must admit that there are many times when I fail to achieve I-Thou as an advocate. But when my conversation partner and I reach candid, respectful communication, we have a conversation that is as spiritually engaging and uplifting—and entering Eternal Thou—just as we do when we sit down to pray.

Rabbi Dennis Ross is a religious advocate and directs an interfaith program, Concerned Clergy for Choice of the Education Fund of Planning Advocates of New York State. He serves as a congregational rabbi. Dennis Ross has written for *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. His recent book is *All Politics Is Religious: Speaking Faith to the Media, Policy Makers and the Community © 2012 Skylight Paths Publishing.* www.DennisRoss.net www.familyplanningadvocates.org

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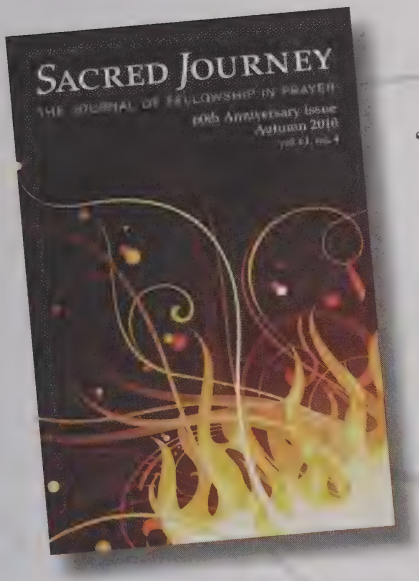

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CON-STITUTION

EULETA USREY

That grand ol' document
so beautiful
so profound
makes me want
to cry!

We The People
killed the natives
enslaved the labor
denied women the vote
in order to form
a more perfect union?

I wonder. Let's make
our deeds
MATCH
our words.

Euleta Usrey is a free-lance writer and editing professional from the Greater Los Angeles area.

God Who Made It All

DOUGLAS RAYMOND ROSE

May He give to all of you a heart to Worship Him
and to do His will readily and generously."
2 Maccabees 1:3

Red Wine
Green apples
Golden potatoes
God made it all.

Salty blue sea air
Flowering gardens
Sailing white clouds aloft
God made it all.

Sparkling waters
Brown faced sailors
Immigrants arriving daily
God created them all.

Eyes and ears
Hands and feet
Arms, fingers and legs
Worship God—
The God who made it all!

Douglas Raymond Rose is an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God. He is a free-lance journalist for *Guideposts* and *Standard Publishing* and writes for the *Dallas Morning News: Best Southwest*—the *Southern Dallas Area On-Line Community News Source*. He is a member of the Academy of American Poets and the Texas State Historical Society.

Destiny

CATHERINE ROSS

Destiny is not made
By the brilliance of stars,
Rather is forged
In a humbler world.

Destiny lives freely
In the expression
Of our inner being
With the condition given.

It is found
In the work of our calling,
Yet often is lost
In meaningless tasks.

While in life's changing waters,
Seek we our destiny
With positive thought
And creative acts.

Catherine Ross' educational background is in the humanities. She speaks five languages: English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese. She is fortunate to travel to the countries where these languages are spoken, so she can learn more about their respective cultures. Her poetry represents her attempt to better know her spiritual nature and that of humanity, and all that surrounds us.

The Meaning of Martyrdom

KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI

In the Christian tradition there are two well-known kinds of martyrs—white martyrs and red ones. Red martyrs are the heroes who shed blood in the defense of their faith, or challenge the principalities and powers of this world and end up dying because of their witness—people like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oscar Romero. White martyrs are remarkable witnesses to the way of Jesus in their daily lives, who also give their lives sacrificially, but more often die in their beds—people like Dorothy Day or Desmond Tutu (and may he live many more years!).

The Celtic Christians saw white martyrs as those who left home and family behind to follow Jesus on the road—like Columba, the founder of the monastery on the Scottish island of Iona, or the monks who wandered the seas in little leather boats or those who went to Scandinavia to spread the gospel. There's an old Irish tradition about *glasmartres*, translated either as green or blue martyrs, who lived radically ascetic lives focused on repentance. The color may have something to do with the skin tone of one who fasts all the time, or the sense that the ascetic went out into the green and wild lands, in the same way that the early monastics in Egypt—the desert mothers and fathers—took the desert as their home.

The first Japanese martyrs were the red sort, persecuted, tortured and executed for being Christians. The known history of evangelization in Japan began with Francis Xavier in 1549, the same year the first English prayer book was published. Francis only stayed three years, but left a Jesuit team in place as well as some two thousand Christians. The Portuguese Jesuit mission continued to gain converts, as well as support from the ruling shogun, up into the 1580s. The next shogun, under

pressure from Buddhist clergy, ordered the Jesuits to leave but they weren't all forced out. Things got more difficult when Spanish Franciscans showed up in the early 1590s and began to compete for converts. The rumor went around that the Jesuits were Portugal's beachhead to facilitate its territorial conquest of Japan. The shogun executed the twenty-six Christians we remember every year on February 5 and ordered all the Jesuits out. That shogun soon died but his successor didn't completely enforce the expulsion order either.

In 1600 a Dutch ship limped into a Japanese port with William Adams, on whose story James Clavell's historical novel *Shogun* is based. He stayed twenty years and explained the difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity to the shogun, which eventually led to expelling all the Roman Catholics. The persecutions, tortures and executions finally culminated in 1637, which is the last public trace of Christianity until Japan reopened to the West in the 1850s. Yet when that happened, thousands of underground Christians emerged, having passed down their faith, sharing the good news of the gospel from generation to generation without benefit of clergy or missionaries.

That inherited Christianity might be seen as the result of the quiet witness of ten generations and the memory of those red martyrs. It's an example of another kind of martyrdom—the patient endurance of people of faith, caring quietly for their neighbors, proclaiming the good news of God's love in deed when the explicit word is not possible.

Something similar happened in China during the Cultural Revolution. It was a much shorter period, but the work of missionaries that started in the late 1800s grew and flourished during the intense and violent persecutions under Chairman Mao in the 1960s and 1970s. An Anglican priest, Roland Allen, went to China at the end of the nineteenth century with the sense that he should convey the scriptures and the sacraments and then get out of the way. He insisted that it was Paul's way

of witnessing, and that the good news needs some freedom to take root in new soil and emerge as a vine able to thrive in that new soil.

In many places we live with the painful consequences of a form of witness that was culturally bound—among Native Americans as well as in other parts of the globe. Japan, where Christians represent less than one percent of the population, lives with that struggle to this day. Archbishop Nathaniel Uematsu spoke with me about those challenges recently. People there who have received the witness of earlier Christians in one particular form often assume that that is the only possible or correct way of expressing their faith. The Nippon Sei Ko Kai, Japanese Anglican Church, is much tied to traditional ways of worship—ways that do not easily communicate across the chasm between the church and society. We live with the same challenges in the United States—hymns that don't connect with popular cultural idioms, tendencies in some places to use overly directive ways of governing or an insistence that Sunday morning worship is the only proper witness of the church.

Every person baptized in an Episcopal service promises to "proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ." That's being and making a witness—it's martyrdom. Jesus challenges his witnesses to "deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35). What kind of life are we supposed to lose and what self-denial—what cross—are we supposed to pick up?

The answer depends on our context, and there is an urgent claim on all Christians and in some ways it's the same claim on citizens of the United States and indeed of the whole world. The division that's erupted between right and left, between Anglos and Latinos, between "birthers" and "Obamacare" advocates should be evidence. It's the same cross that the Jesuits and Franciscans faced in Japan in the late sixteenth century—and

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it led to immense bloodshed. God managed some resurrection even in the face of that needless death, yet how much more fruit might have been borne by other forms of martyrdom rather than just the red kind?

All those divisions and positions are maintained by the subtle siren song of self-congratulation: I'm right, and therefore, you are wrong.

At a recent bishops' meeting in Arizona, some of us went to the border where we had the powerful experience of hearing a panel speak about their varied yet direct involvement in issues of border-crossing. The participants included a sheriff, a border-patrol commander, an emergency room physician, a rancher, a community activist and a pastor who works on both sides of the border. They all agreed that our immigration system is broken, but it was the pastor who built a bridge across the divisions that nailed every one of us.

He told a story about meeting with a group of teenagers and their parents in preparation for a foray into Mexico. One teen's

mother challenged him: "Do you support illegal immigration?" He thought and then turned the question around. "Well, I certainly participate in it. I eat lettuce and I live in a house that was built in the last twenty years and I like to buy food that isn't terribly expensive . . . Ma'am, do you support illegal immigration?"

Almost all of us participate in the divisions that characterize our society. We may not do it through violent language or shouting demonstrations, but most of us have something of an attitude about the people who use words like "birther" or call themselves members of the Tea Party or insist that people on the other side of an issue simply don't understand because they don't agree with us.

Martyrdom in this context looks like letting go of our self-righteousness. As long as those divisions continue there will be red martyrs, like those shot in Tucson together with Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, whose fate horrifies us simply because their deaths happened in such an ordinary setting. There may be some white martyrs, who leave the safety and comfort of home to go in search of the other, the ones on the far end of whatever position or stance is confronting us. And there may be some blue martyrs who call us all to prayer and repentance for our hardness of heart. And it will take the quiet, careful and methodical witness of those who will begin or continue to love the other in small and great ways. In our proclamation of the gospel, we need to ask ourselves: What sort of martyr will we be?

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori is presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church and the first female Primate in the Anglican Communion. Prior to her ordination she was an oceanographer with the National Marine Fisheries Service as well as a visiting assistant professor at Oregon State University's Dept. of Religious Studies. Excerpted from *Gathering at God's Table: The Meaning of Mission in the Feast of Faith* © 2012 Katharine Jefferts Schori and used with permission by Skylight Paths Publishing. www.skylightpaths.com

Rising Together

VALARIE KAUR

The shooting on August 5, 2012 in Oak Creek, Wisconsin has been the Sikh community's worst fears realized. We were all in a state of shock, in a state of grief. As we've seen from media reports in the hours and days after the attacks, both the media and people in America clearly misunderstand the Sikh community and our faith.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. The American ethic is profoundly compatible with Sikh values. We believe in equality between all people; of all races, classes, backgrounds, genders. We are called upon to realize God, to realize our purpose on earth through service—through *seva*—which is the concept of serving all people.

Sikhs wear five articles of faith in order to represent our devotion to God. The most visible is *kesh*, which is long, uncut hair. Many men and some women wrap their hair in a turban. It is so tragic that this turban, the very sign of our love and commitment to serve our community, has tragically become a target in the decade long aftermath of 9/11.

We know the killings of Matthew Shepard, of David Byrd, of David Kato, of Trayvon Martin and now the shooting of Sikh Americans in Milwaukee are deeply connected—by the fear of people who look different and the people who inspire hate and fear in others. It is our responsibility to combat a culture of violence against people who look different—it's about eclipsing our anger and fear with our love, solidarity and support.

Following the tragic Sikh temple shooting in Wisconsin fellow Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, Unitarian Universalists, atheists and agnostics rose together to say: "Today we are all Sikhs." That is the power of

Valarie Kaur delivers 4,000 letters of support to the Wisconsin Sikh community at the Oak Creek gurdwara one week after six people were killed in their house of worship.

a multifaith America—bridging us from tragedy to compassion and community. That was a moment that called upon all of us to recommit to the idea of a country devoted to religious pluralism—one of respect and of peace.

Can we make this a time that calls us to work for a world without violence?

Valarie Kaur is a third-generation Sikh American. She is an award winning film maker, advocate and director of Groundswell, a multifaith, social action network for justice at Auburn Seminary. She uses strategic story telling to advance social action campaigns on racial justice, immigration reform, detention practices, religious pluralism and gender equality. Valarie has been called "a woman of extraordinary courage" and "an inspiring millennial." www.groundswell-movement.org

The Boy on the Curb

NANCY SCHENSEMA

It is dawn. The sun is beginning to break over the horizon and the air smells of dirt and dampness. I see him every morning as I leave for work. He is huddled with his knees pulled up against his chest. He looks like he is shivering. Every day he wears the same lightweight hoodie, tattered blue jeans and torn running shoes. At his feet the ground is littered with bits of debris—smashed beer bottles and pieces of fast-food waste are crushed against the concrete. Above his head hangs a pair of dirty sneakers wrapped around the telephone wires. He sits on the curb waiting for the school bus, watching the cars go by. Later there will be other children waiting with him. But it is early and on this day, just like every day, he waits alone. I ask myself, "Is he cold? Has he had something to eat this morning?" Is he the insignificant reflection of the growing poverty our society faces? Do the passing motorists even notice the boy on the curb? It is a demoralizing reality.

Then I wonder, "What kind of parent leaves a small child alone for an hour at the school bus stop each morning?" I think I know the answer. But the questions continue to go through my mind; is she the single mother in a society that doesn't care anymore; does she leave for work before the sun rises and returns after dark; does she face the daily struggle to make ends meet; will she have to make the choice between heat and food as she struggles to manage on her meager wage? She is not so different from many of us who don't have enough money to pay all the bills.

She is just one of the working poor—an interesting label. I hear and read about it in the news. The journalists report about the demotion of the middle class. How once there was a promise of a comfortable lifestyle for all but now many of

us find ourselves with no options and no buying power. The working poor have jobs—get a paycheck, yet are unable to make ends meet. As each month goes by our neighborhoods collapse, families fall farther and farther behind—deeper into debt, lost in despair. The children suffer in silence. How will our communities stay strong?

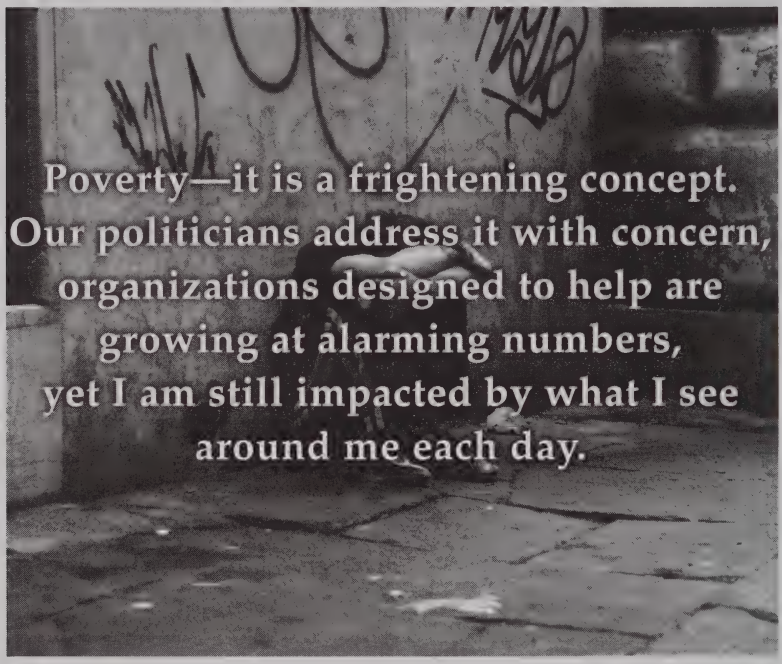
I know there are places of desperation in all areas of the world, yet somehow this is different because I see it—I see it every day in my once "good-Samaritan" type of neighborhood—where we lived happily with that promise and supported one another. It is changed now. No one seems to smile these days. The young males are angry—forming gangs who, as evening falls, loiter on the street corners and in the parking lots. The older folks in the neighborhood don't come outside anymore. Many families are even afraid to walk their dogs after dark; they simply tie them up outside the front door and let them bark at the night sounds. Like that of a man and woman screaming in yet another domestic violence scene, children crying, gunshots and sirens.

At night I lie in my bed and turn up the radio because I don't know what to do and I just don't want to hear it anymore. Perhaps a year ago, before the neighborhood changed I would have done *something*—spoken-up?—ventured out to help?—made certain the children were safe? But now I am like the others, I do *nothing*.

I tell my friends that I live in the hood—a 'label' that has been contrived to describe our now working poor neighborhoods. But it's not a joke; I flippantly use it when I talk with my friends and family who don't know the area. They say I am melodramatic but they don't really understand. They don't see what I see—desperation and poverty growing at an alarming rate. The people that live here are the one's today's news reports and statistics are all about; more and more of us are losing our jobs and our livelihoods. We live in a cycle of fear; will we lose our home? Will the costs of utilities go up? Will we even have a job tomorrow?

We are all frightened souls in these scary times. We are all afraid; all the time. We close our doors and pull our curtains shut. We don't want to see the need. We don't want to hear the cries. It is too difficult.

Tonight, I convince myself that I will do something to make things better. I make a decision—on my way to work in the morning, I will stop and say "good morning" to the boy sitting on the curb and give him some fruit and granola bars. At least I will be doing *something*.


Poverty—it is a frightening concept.
Our politicians address it with concern,
organizations designed to help are
growing at alarming numbers,
yet I am still impacted by what I see
around me each day.

The next day as I drive out of the neighborhood I see some familiar faces. They have a panicky look. There is a hushed chatter among them. Some are saying a small boy was shot and killed by stray bullets last night and several teens were arrested. As I approach where the boy sits on the curb, he is not there.

I wonder, is there no school today? Am I too early? But deep in my heart I know the truth and for an instant I despise myself

for not acting sooner. Why have I been so weak? I silently pray and ask God to forgive me for being fearful and to help me find a way to understand my weaknesses, just a simple sign to help me understand.

I turn my car at the familiar corner and look up. I see a billboard. The large letters loom, "LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THY SELF" (Leviticus 19:18). Had it always been there? Am I seeing it for the first time? The words are encouraging. They are familiar. I have read them in the bible many times. They are in fact all-encompassing and they are now chiseled in my heart and mind. Each morning I stare into the mirror and repeat them out loud..."Love Thy Neighbor as Thy Self."

Perhaps we can all confront our sense of helplessness and explore our feelings and fears of poverty which we most find disturbing about poverty. The outcome may be that together, as a society, we may seek a solution. SJ

Nancy Schensema's career in newspaper advertising and publishing has spanned over twenty years. She has also studied Homeopathic Medicine and Nutrition. Raised in Canada, she now lives with her husband in Tennessee and enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren as well as hiking, gardening and out-tripping adventures.

An Apolitical Faith

EMILY GOLDBERG

I despise politics.

Between the Democratic hippies and the right-wing Republicans, I consider myself somewhere in the middle, where most of the ignorance lies. I simply do not see the point for politics to consume the lives of average Americans. Because of politics, families have been torn apart; something as futile as a misunderstood speech or discussion creates more wars than unity. Past presidents have had their lives jeopardized by extremists who disagree with their personal and religious values. Therefore, I do not believe that established politics of any form should be preached from the *bimah* or voiced in a synagogue.

My genuine odium toward politics was not derived from my own Jewish community. In fact, I was blessed with a synagogue whose spiritual leader refrained from sharing his political views altogether. My rabbi's sermons regarding Israel presented every political angle of a situation, but never concluded with one formal approach. When interrogated about upcoming elections, my rabbi refuses to share his preferred presidential candidate. While many congregants find his confidentiality to be unnecessary in the modern rabbinic world, I admire him for it. I can only hope that one day, when I stand before a Jewish community of my own, I will remain impartial and open-minded.

As a spiritually seeking seventeen year old, I just want answers. I am always formulating questions regarding the existence of God, faith, and new approaches to spirituality. When I take these questions to the Jewish leaders that surround me, I only want religious opinions. Unfortunately, I have been told that there are too many

political boundaries between different Jewish denominations to break in order to find the answers I need. "Don't listen to that rabbi's answer; he's doesn't support Israel!" "That congregation does not serve Kosher Kiddush lunches; we cannot eat with those 'goyim.'" "That synagogue plays music on Friday nights; how could that rabbi teach you about God when he, himself, won't even follow the laws of the Torah?!" I learned to abhor politics when they hindered my personal connection to Judaism. Never again will I settle for anything less than the theological answers I need in order to grow in my faith. When cruel gossip is incorporated with one's religious opinion, I simply shrug and keep searching for truth. It is a shame, however, how politics both inside and outside a Jewish community can diverge its future generations rather than unify them.

Is it even possible to eradicate politics entirely within our own Jewish communities? Will we ever see a day where congregations can be unified based solely on faith?

Until that day arrives, it should be our obligation to avoid the political flaws that distract us throughout our respective faith journeys. Judaism may be an ever-evolving faith, but its values of *kehilla kedosha,* a holy community, are everlasting. Let us take our faith to new heights while we grow closer as a Jewish community, completely void of the politics that attempt to diverge us.

May Judaism become an apolitical faith once again; let our leaders be inspired to guide spiritual communities of any size, and let those communities reconnect to the solid roots of our faith. SJ

Emily Goldberg is a student at the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in Manhattan. She is founder of *Common Ground Friends.* This summer, she joined a lifelong network of future Jewish leaders, "Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel" and discovered her appreciation for Jewish pluralism and communal learning. She hopes to pursue interfaith studies, social action, rabbinics and writing.

The Way of The Heart

STEWART BITKOFF

You yourself are under your own veil.
~ Hafiz

According to Sufi tradition, we all have an aspect of the Divine within our soul. This spiritual center is termed the heart and because of the use of this term, seekers on this spiritual Path have been called followers of 'The Way of the Heart.'

The job of each spiritual traveler is to wipe their heart clean from all the 'dust' caused by years of selfish living. Through interactions between student, the Master and the Path, a traveler's goal is to reach human excellence, becoming a clear mirror reflecting Divine Light.

Training involves taking the Light and reflecting it out across our hearts to those we love and care about. Through our purposeful direction, the Light cleans the mirror of our heart, enriching and enabling us to make this world a brighter place.

The following spiritual practice will help you expand your capacity to reflect the Light and dissipate darkness. Try it for five days and see what happens! However, don't overdo it.

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Heart as Mirror Practice

To cleanse away the residue of the day's long activities take a relaxing bath or shower. Put on comfortable clothing and go to an undisturbed quiet place. Be relaxed and at ease. To help yourself focus, decide on a focus word before you start. You might want to chant this Sufi prayer to begin:

> Let my heart reflect thy Light, O Lord.
> As the moon reflects the light of the sun
> In Love
> Always in Love.
> Hu Allah, Hu Allah, Hu Allah, Allah Hu

Sit quietly, letting your thoughts come and go, not giving any importance to them. When your mind wanders, slowly repeat your focus word. Ask God to help you refocus inward and go deeper. Do this as many times as needed, without getting upset or impatient with yourself. When you are completely still, free of distracting thoughts, imagine your spiritual heart as a mirror. See this heart/mirror and feel its vibrancy and inner life. In your mind's eye, take your hand and using one strong stroke, wipe away all the dust covering your heart, making it clean.

Next see and feel the Light of the Universe entering this world; guide it toward you, feeling its healing energy. Identify and see the first person you wish to caress with this Light, letting it glide across your heart/mirror and reflect it out to them. See the Light illuminate their individual darkness.

Then identify the next person and continue.

Allow your heart to mirror the Light for 2-3 minutes.

To end the practice you may thank God for enabling you to reflect the Divine Light.

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff is an avid student of Sufi Mysticism. He has spent most of his career specializing in therapeutic recreation in psychiatric rehabilitation. His two most recent books are *Sufism for Western Seekers: Path of the Spiritual Traveler in Everyday Life* and *The Ferryman's Dream.*

Death in a House of Worship: Contextualizing Hate

TARA DOMINICK

"*In nomine Patris,*" intoned my grandfather patiently. Eight years old, perched on the arm of his favorite sitting chair, I responded, "In the name of the Father."

My most vivid childhood memories are of my grandfather. A first-generation American, he spoke to me in a gravelly Oklahoma accent salted with Italian nursery rhymes and Latin prayers. He was a quiet man raised in a rigid blend of cultures rooted in old-world Roman Catholicism and Dust Bowl depression. My grandfather served in Okinawa in WWII. From the day he returned to the day he died, he never spoke a word of that war, and he never missed a day of mass.

My grandfather knew hardship. He knew what it was to be an unwelcome immigrant, to live in poverty, and to feel forsaken in the fight of a brutal war. Many pass knowledge of struggle and pain on to their children as cautionary tales, a warning to insulate oneself and not to trust. Too often this upbringing breeds intolerance, anger, and even hatred toward others. My grandfather was not that sort of man.

My grandfather was the sort of man who cut good whiskey with a little water, to savor the flavor just a bit longer. He was a man who romanticized the story of his mother's young death and his father's subsequent rapid descent into senility: "He died of a broken heart," he'd murmur. Even in old age, he recalled his wife's beauty and small waist when they first married. He joked of her haphazard cooking experiments when unsuitable foods were combined just to have enough for a meal. His stories weren't of lean times and loneliness; they were of love and cohesion.

My grandfather never knew of my conversion to Judaism. My own father has never openly approved or spoken of my faith. In the past several years, I've continually struggled to combine the culture in which I was raised, a culture often resistant to nontraditional life choices, with the culture I've adopted, one perpetually tied to complicated internal and external politics. All too frequently, these two worlds have seemed immiscible.

The shooting at the Sikh gurdwara in Wisconsin brings all of this to mind once again. The response to this tragic, hate-inspired event has overwhelmingly been a call for solidarity. Sikhs are not calling for revenge; their reaction has not been political mudslinging or reverberating hate. Instead, there have been countless vigils, prayer services, and support efforts. And it is breathtaking.

In Judaism, we say of the dead *zichronam livracha*—may their memories be a blessing. In the midst of devastating tragedy and bereavement, there is a blessing to be found in loss, namely, a reminder of our most basic humanity. The shooting at the gurdwara is not isolated to the Sikh community; it is a loss of human life that affects us all. I believe my grandfather understood the true breadth of loss. He understood that grief and hardship are a prompt for unity and resilience. He understood the need for renewal and faith, as well as forgiveness.

In difficult times, we turn to the comforts of our traditions and faith. My prayer is that we may draw on these traditions and our communities for support, but also reach beyond them. I pray for renewal and for solidarity. I pray that memories of the dead, of our fathers, and of our grandfathers be a blessing to all, and that their names never be forgotten. SJ

Tara Dominick works as an editor for the Russian Academy of Sciences and interns for The Groundswell Movement. Formerly of the University of Southern California Law School, she is currently applying to graduate programs in International Relations.

God of Light

SANDRA MIRANDA TULLY

I am no blind fool
I see the golden light
    yet keep the distance

I am no blind fool
I see the golden light
    yet sometimes turn away

I am blinded
by fool's gold
and glitter of day

May I remember to pray
    Hold the Light Eternal
    for your night wandering child

Sandra Miranda Tully lives a contemplative life as poet, mentor and companion to fellow spiritual seekers. Inspiration in her writing life comes from prayer and meditation, nature, family, and abundant gratitude. Sandra's writing appears in a variety of literary and multi-faith journals.

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Show Us a Path

LAURA CRAIG

Divine Spirit of all, we are at a crossroads.
We know our political decisions impact our country
as well as all humanity living around the globe.
Open us and soften us to your presence.
Illumine our hearts to listen;
temper our judging minds.
Show us a path which leads to
peaceful living,
eradication of hunger
and meaningful work for all.
Bless whomever we elect
with wisdom, patience and
true discernment leading to fair decisions.
Sanctify our efforts to become a nation
that truly cares,
forgives,
and respects all,
as we struggle to embody
your endless love and compassion.

Rev. Laura Craig is an ordained Interfaith/Interspiritual minister, spiritual director, and Reiki practitioner. She officiates personalized ceremonies, prayer services and rituals. Laura also leads invocations, presentations and retreats. Her highest aspiration is to become a bridge between people of different faiths, enabling them to respect and honor each other's traditions in an effort to bring some peace into our very broken world. Visit her website at http://groundsforministry.com.

Moral and Messy: Faith and the Political Process

Fellowship in Prayer again joined the Peace Islands Institute (formerly Interfaith Dialog Center of Central Jersey) in hosting an Interfaith Dialogue Luncheon on Moral and Messy: Faith and the Political Process. *In her introduction, moderator, Diane Ciccone, noted that we may never have imagined this kind of dialogue twenty-five years ago and how enlightening it is to have this time and opportunity, not only to talk about faith and politics, but to talk about them in an interfaith environment. Diane said, "How does one balance faith with policy? How do you protect religious freedom particularly for those who hold different beliefs? How do you balance world law and religious tenets?" Our presenters answered, in their respective faith traditions, these questions and more. Please join us in pondering the world of faith and politics with these excerpts from the luncheon presentations.*

. . . In Christianity

Dr. Roland Anglin

I'm a political scientist by training and we are taught to look at all aspects of the political system and what impacts that system. So, today's topic is especially poignant and important to those of us who care about the democratic project. Especially the democratic project we call America. But if we're honest, I think we should all be disturbed by how faith now intersects with our political life in the United States. And I do believe it is

a recent phenomena of some twenty years. I'm at an age where I get called old fashioned because I refer to a day when things were better, when in truth and fact they probably were not. Yet in this respect I think we had better times in the interchange between politics and religion.

I tell you what, I'm a big believer in using the foundational documents when I teach—in fact, in my urban politics class everybody expects me to use the standard text books, but I don't! I use the speech John Winthrop gave on the Arabella to several hundred Puritans who were sailing to the United States to set up a new colony. Generally people will have a puzzled look and say, "Wow, why are you doing that?"

I tell them in Winthrop's speech you understand what America is about. And America is about, not just separation of religion and its role in political life, but the sentiment that they should coexist in cultures with respect.

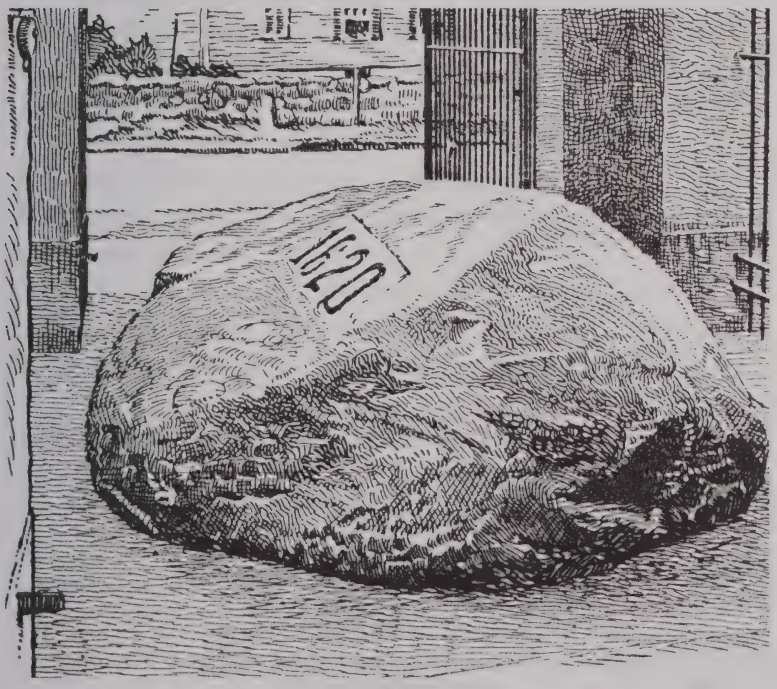
When the Puritans arrived, they believed religion should have its own place. In truth and fact, if you read the foundational documents, commerce had more of a role in those documents than religion. It relays the message that one did good works and established a community in which you helped your brother through commerce and through community life. I often refer to this using the phrase, "the community of brothers."

Religion entered the ballpark, so to speak, by what you did on earth, contributing to your community and neighbors. Because Winthrop believed God is present, he believed in the perfectibility of human beings in the world. But that doesn't mean you should go ahead and have a religious state.

As human beings we have choices in our political life, our community life and everything about us. On earth we should do good works and then we find our reward someplace else. You see that rife throughout, not only with the growth of philanthropy in the United States, but in some European nations as well. It's the same tenor of the relationship between what you honor on earth and what you achieve in the afterlife

that is quite important. This goes across faith communities—it was the same for Andrew Carnegie as it was for Julius Rosenthal.

My point is that religion always had its own separate sphere and if it bled over into the political life it would do great damage to that sphere. If you look at what Washington and Jefferson said about religion, they always mentioned the role of God in the United States but never mentioned Christianity. They were extremely careful to separate mentioning one religion over another. If you read what Eisenhower said about religion; if you read Kennedy's inaugural speech, you'll see that tradition held. I believe that tradition has changed—religion has bled over into our political life and it is in danger of influencing in a way that corrodes our democracy.



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Now, there is a litmus test about religion and how religious you are that is extremely dangerous for our democratic institution. Why does this occur? I'm not sure, but I think it's because we've changed so much demographically. We are now part of a globalized world so we could, in some respects, be *sui generis* in the past that we're almost the same—but there were fewer differences among immigrants—in the past, degrees of freedom were extended to Catholics, Jews and Mormons. Because so many more people are coming to our shores, degrees of religious freedom are greater—now we have Jainism, Hinduism and many other religions and we don't know what to do with them—we're going back to the primordial sphere where we have to reify that we are Christian. That is dangerous for a nation in a globalized world because we cannot stay in those boxes of religion.

So the point I will leave you with is we have to figure out what institutions will push back against this new bleeding of religion into our political life. Because it doesn't strengthen it, it corrodes it. We have to find ways of talking about gaining perspective on different religions, because in truth and fact, if we don't, it imperils our democracy. SJ

Dr. Roland V. Anglin's career spans over twenty years of working in the public, educational and philanthropic sectors. Currently he is Director and Associate Research Professor at The Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers University. He manages two research evaluations for NJ, both linked to the role of crime prevention and youth development as a precursor to economic development. Dr. Anglin is the author of *Promoting Sustainable Local and Community Development* and is co-author of *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America* and *Resilience and Opportunity.*

. . . In Judaism

RABBI ROBERT L. WOLKOFF

I'd like to begin by telling two contradictory stories. There is this wonderful narrative about Fr. Daniel Berrigan. It was during the Viet Nam War when he and a group of clergymen met with Henry Kissinger in Washington, DC. They urged him to end the war in Viet Nam. Kissinger said, "How exactly do you expect me to do that?" Fr. Berrigan replied, "Sir, our job is to remind you of the words from the Prophet that 'justice shall roll like a mighty stream.' Your job, Mr. Secretary, is to take care of the plumbing."

So, if you follow that story, the implication is that our job as religious people is to propose certain values and standards and then call on our politicians to do whatever is practical to bring our ideas to fruition.

But of course, that distinction is an artificial distinction. It's a cute story but in reality the politician is likely to say, "Hey, I've got practical problems to address, what exactly would you like me to do?"

Now, fast-forward a number of years—I was attending a Rabbinical Assembly convention. The Rabbinical Assembly is the international organization of Conservative Rabbis. In virtually every religious organization, when they have their convention, there will be a set of resolutions that, I assure you, nobody in Washington is waiting to read with bated breath. Nevertheless, it is a useful exercise for the organization to articulate various kinds of positions to think about, and then bring ideas back to our congregations. At our convention we always have a series of political resolutions that are voted on by the Assembly. So one year that I was in attendance, a

resolution was offered to increase the minimum wage. It was felt that working people were not really getting a fair shake, and they needed increased incomes, so therefore we should raise the minimum wage.

My initial inclination was to support the resolution. But then I started asking myself, "What exactly do I know about raising the minimum wage?" Yes, I believe 100 percent that people on the lower end of the economic spectrum need help, support, certainly to be treated fairly and I would like for their condition to be improved. As a citizen of the United States, yeah, I was inclined to think that raising the minimum wage is a good idea. But as a rabbi, I didn't remember taking courses in macroeconomics when I was studying at seminary.

> One should surround oneself with people seeking the truth and flee from those who have found it.

I could *imagine* the particular effects of increasing the minimum wage but I did not *know* enough to vote in favor of such a resolution. In fact, the truth of the matter is there are dozens of Nobel Prize winners in Economics who will argue with each other on this topic. And because I studied the Talmud I'm supposed to know whether or not to raise the minimum wage? That's simply not a reasonable proposition.

So what do we do? Should we just leave it to the politicians and let them decide? Or are we, as religious leaders, supposed to come up with something substantive?

It's an impossible dilemma. But I would like to suggest today that there is something about religion and faith, and in particular about prayer, that could be of real political value. Prayer offers possibilities, a way to, so to speak, break the logjam, a way to allow change to happen.

For example, recently I was privileged to experience

spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is a meditative prayer process. The spiritual director helps the directee find a prayerful space where one can open oneself up to the Word of God. One of the essential aspects of direction, an exercise that needs to happen when that prayerful space opens up, is something that's referred to as "Discernment." It's the ability to feel, with great profundity, and to distinguish between two different categories of thought. One category is the self-serving thoughts and the rational thoughts that arise quite naturally in our normal internal dialogue. The second category is the thoughts that come either from deep inside or from "outside" oneself, and have such compelling force as to move one in a different, and unexpected, direction. Such ideas that "come to us"—however it is that they "come" to us—break our own internal logjam.

When I am involved in Spiritual Direction, as a directee or as a director, what I experience, every single time, is that while going through the rigorous prayer that creates the atmosphere where God can work, something that I did not come up with myself—something that I did not ascertain with my own logical thinking—somehow "arrives."

Whether that's the Word of God—I can't prove it, but it's certainly not something I went into the room thinking about. It is a tremendously humbling experience to pray, and to be answered, in that way, especially since I have been a clergyman for over thirty years. You would think that as a rabbi, I would know how to pray. But I can tell you, as a newcomer to this world of prayer, that since I learned to stop thinking long enough to create the space to pray and to listen, I have not been the same. It is a stunning experience.

You see, because as a clergyman, with this whole academic thing in my background, since I went through years of training and have years of experience, people automatically think I'm supposed to know everything. So it was a true emotional *revolution* to suddenly have the *revelation*, first, that I didn't

know everything; and second, that in fact God will speak to me to tell me what I didn't know; and further, that the most valuable lessons I learn are precisely those concepts that I did not know and that I did not come up with myself.

That is what prayer can do.

Now, I just have to keep practicing to shut up long enough that I'll be able to hear God speaking inside me . . . and that's very hard for rabbis!

And for politicians, too. Consequently, turning back to our political question: to break the political logjam that happens in every election I would like to suggest that we—all of us, the citizens, the political leaders and the religious leaders, develop a prayerful attitude and seek God's help in discernment. Myself included. What spiritual direction and intense prayer have underscored for me is the idea that there is no place in politics or in life for litmus tests that are based on a rigid sense of dogma where one absolutely "knows" what is right and what is wrong. Instead, I think it is essential for each and every one of us to proceed, with a prayerful attitude, to seek God's help in discerning if the minimum wage really should be increased, how the economic recovery can best be handled, how we can assist serving the underprivileged, how we can address immigration policies, how we can act responsibly to address environmental concerns, how can we cut taxes, how can we not cut taxes . . . and the list goes on.

Václav Havel, may he rest in peace, once said that one should surround oneself with people seeking the truth, and flee from those who have found it. Now, the bad news here is that in the political spectrum *everybody* has found the truth, each politician *knows* everything. Everywhere in the world those who follow political situations appear to know all the answers. Yes, they have *different* answers, but each one *knows* the answers. To me, that is suspect on its face. I would want to ask, is there *something* that you don't know? Instead of insisting on knowing everything, is there any area of concern

where one could use quiet, where one could listen? Perhaps listen to another's perspective? Seek a different way? Seek God and God's insights?

Where is the politician who will get up and say, "I'm sorry, I don't have an answer for that. I'll have to give the matter some thought"?

Well, actually I recall just before President Clinton's inauguration, he was being interviewed by foreign correspondents asking him about Uzbekistan, Brazil and everything in between. He had an answer for everything. At one point, though, a reporter from New Zealand asked a question that involved a territorial dispute with, if I remember correctly, the Cook Islands. Eventually Clinton burst into laughter and said, "I'm sorry, I really don't have an answer to your question." That was the one thing he did not know. He knew about everything else on the planet, just not that one thing. This to me is profoundly problematic, even scary. It frightens me that we have this massive lack of humility.

The good news is that with faith we really can move forward. We can move forward by encouraging others and ourselves to vote for politicians who display the ability to open themselves to unexpected possibilities, to new thinking, to listening, perhaps even to the Word of God. SJ

Rabbi Robert L. Wolkoff is currently rabbi of Congregation Bnai Tikvah in North Brunswick, NJ and founding director of *Blackfire*, an international Jewish consultancy. He has published and lectured internationally on topics of religious, political and moral concerns. He has lectured at the World Conference of Jewish Communal Service Quadrennial in Jerusalem and has authored chapters on Bible, Judaism, Jewish mysticism and philosophy, Zionism, Israel, Jewish integration models in Europe, anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred. While serving the Jewish community as rabbi in Gothenburg, Sweden, he was known as a "tone-setting voice in the Swedish social, political and cultural debate."

. . . In Islam

Dr. Mesut Sahin

First I'll begin by telling you that I was born, raised and lived half of my life in a Muslim country and have been living here in the United States for over twenty some years. In fact, these are my only qualifications for speaking here today. I will be looking at democracy and politics as a Muslim-American. It is my opinion that in an ideal democracy, the government has a duty to consider not only the materialistic needs of its people but also the spiritual and religious needs as well. There are threads common to all of our faiths that we will live peacefully as a society when they are met by the government. I believe this is the next level of democracy and is the direction we need to go for the betterment of all of this country's citizens.

Democracy is an idea that is continually changing—growing, learning, updating itself—to organize and reorganize so that the system remains perfect. Is the current form of democracy really perfect? I guess not, because obviously there are some problems.

As a Muslim and as people of faith in general living in this country, we understand the separation of church and state. We largely accept and believe in this governance. However, if this separation allows us to become insensitive to the needs of faith based communities and treat the entire population according to materialistic premises it is a mistake—it is the wrong direction to go.

Although I am by no means an expert on politics, I must say the political process seems to be a bit detached from its citizens in this country. Yes, we vote but between elections it is the job of the Congress, Senate and local representatives to have the citizen's voices be heard. It seems like our elected

officials are not paying attention to what we are asking of them or what they have promised before they were elected. So in this regard I think there is a big gap between the people on the street and the government. As a result of this lack of interaction, the needs of small faith communities are not even considered when making decisions at any level of the governance.

As citizens, we all want our government to be morally and spiritually responsible and of course faith is one of the strongest bonds between peoples of the same tradition. Each faith based group in the US may sympathize with different nations or traditions outside the US when the US government takes initiatives in global wars. Needless to say, whether you are Christian, Jew or Muslim, war is troublesome. When the US has military presence in so many different countries for one reason or another, as a faith community you may have some sympathy for the people in those countries. It feels like the government does not pay attention to the Muslim concerns in this area and again this sometimes can make the Muslim-American communities feel like we are not yet fully part of this family of the United States.

Another example of insensitivity toward the Muslim population in the US would be that even before the economic crisis, it was difficult for Muslim women to find jobs. I believe there may be an issue with the dress of Muslim women. When women wear the *hijab* it is associated with the Middle East and a certain way of thinking rather than with the religion of Islam. The Muslim dress code for women is a way for them to identify themselves as Muslim and ask to be treated with high moral standards in the society. Wearing a hijab does not mean that she is a fundamentalist or of Middle Eastern descent. Yet, rather than being treated on higher standards, they are being discriminated against due to their appearance.

There is also the recent surveillance cameras that some government officials placed in several mosques. There was

a survey taken in New York City where the results showed a majority of participants felt safer having cameras placed in various mosques, even though many felt that action violated the freedom of some citizens. I wonder if the results of this survey would be the same if the population in question were followers of a majority religion. These sort of incidents indicate to me a lack of sensitivity toward Muslim-Americans.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope and concerns that our political leaders be much more sensitive to the needs and values of all our faith communities and that our politics might be shaped at the local, state and national level. Only then can we be confident that our children will inherit a better democracy than the one we have today. SJ

Dr. Mesut Sahin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering at New Jersey Institute of Technology where he teaches Electronic Instrumentation courses while his research efforts concentrate on Brain-Computer Interfaces. He received his MS and Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering from Case Western Reserve University of Ohio. He performed post-doctoral work in the Neural Engineering Center at Case Western Reserve University and received a post-doctoral fellowship from Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation. Sahin has over fifty peer reviewed publications in his field. He is a Senior Member of Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Tibet's Self Murder: Tragedy or Transformation?

JOHN HALPERN AND MARIA SLIWA

The charred, bodily remains of many self-immolators have been unceremoniously disposed of by local Chinese police, according to reports. Scores of Tibetans have reportedly committed self-immolation in protest against what they say are increasing atrocities committed by China.

What was in the minds of these Tibetans that caused them to set themselves on fire? Were these the final acts of frustration, despair and defiance, as Tibetans say? Or, were they treasonous acts of political perpetrators, as China's officials claim?

If these self-immolations are intended as the ultimate rejection of Chinese control, a cry for independence and a declaration of human rights, what does this imply to the outside world? And what can this mean to us?

At least forty-one Tibetans have set themselves on fire since Feb. 27, 2009, and thirty-one have died, according to the International Campaign for Tibet, an advocacy group in Washington. If these acts were born of extreme desperation, having exhausted all other means of prayer, petition or protest, what else can our response be other than immense sadness and pity?

At the core of these world developments and of this story, is the blossoming of a "culture of activism," a rarely addressed but vital subject. This non-governmental force, independently initiated by communities, internationally and functioning within legal boundaries, or not, challenges the frontiers of freedoms of expression, assembly, demonstration, civil liberty and civil rights.

Most importantly, the legacies of the Tibetan self-immolators leave behind some mysterious and delicate

questions about religion and its relation to activism: What, if at all, is the religious component of suicide, given the circumstances? Is the act one of blasphemy? When one's religious freedom is terminated and the last of one's acts is suicide, if the mind of the victim is of an altruistic, compassionate nature, albeit desperate and defiant, can self-immolation be considered a spiritual act?

The Tibetan suicides, whether motivated religiously, spiritually, politically or some hybrid of the three, occur after sixty years of Chinese occupation. They also occur at a time in history when instant activism and international communication are possible wherever a cell phone is in range.

Yet despite modern technology, history reveals that war, invasions and crusades often result in the vanquishing of an entire culture, regardless of the contributions and gifts that culture had made for a greater, human civilization. For Tibetans, the suicides of their nuns, monks and fellow compatriots are not in vain. They are a rallying cry, literally and symbolically, for independence, freedom and cultural survival. In contrast, if Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution implicitly intended to extinguish Tibet's religion, and the source of its identity and culture, then the self-immolations could mean that Tibet, as we know it, is dying.

Encouraging self-immolation for political purposes would be seen as nihilistic, from a Tibetan Buddhist standpoint. But to honor the sacrifices and politicize them is a passing of the baton, spiritually and morally, through invoking their memory and lives: and pragmatically, by casting the self-immolations into the activist and humanitarian arena.

At this point in time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whose credo, "My religion is kindness," achieved billboard status following his acceptance speech for the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, refuses comment. Since his resignation from political office in 2011, he no longer considers himself a spokesperson for Tibet.

Tammy Baldwin, US Senate candidate, applauded his decision saying, "At a time when despots cling to power, as

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their people yearn for democracy, the Dalai Lama's willful ceding of power is a tribute to his vision to fulfill the aspirations of the Tibetan people and should inspire others around the world."

As a result, Tibetans are now speaking for themselves. While the Dalai Lama has passed them the baton, is there a correlation between his self-absolving his post and the self-immolations? The connection is tangible. After six decades of Chinese occupation, criticism, speculation and rejection of the Tibetan Government in Exile's policies, within the Tibetan community, has been erupting in many forms. Nevertheless, as Tibetans deliberate and debate these topics within their community, worldwide activism for the Tibetan cause has mobilized millions, Tibetan and non-Tibetan.

"We are raising our voices in support of the fundamental rights of Tibetan people at this critical time. The Chinese Government must immediately and unconditionally release all Tibetan political prisoners," said Laima Andrikiene, a long-serving member of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights. "The persecution of Tibetans for their legitimate

demands of freedom of religion and their fundamental rights is not only in contradiction with the principles of humanity, but is a clear infringement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Further, it is a little known fact that the entire Tibetan Diaspora, outside China's borders, numbers only two-hundred thousand. Let's think about that. Only two-hundred thousand have managed to mount a formidable, international campaign for their culture's survival against the Chinese leading superpower.

During February and March of this year, four Tibetans, three lay people and one lama, sat in vigil outside the UN and were fasting until death against the atrocities. Six thousand of the eight thousand local Tibetan New York region residents joined there for a rally to mark the 1959 Lhasa Uprising in Tibet. Numerous "political theater" type demonstrations occurred in India, across the United States, Canada and elsewhere, transforming tactics right out of the Greenpeace, Occupy Wall Street activists' handbooks into a new Post China Oppressed Tibetan lexicon of dramatic protest. Letters and calls flooded news rooms and the UN Office for Human Rights at both New York and Geneva branches. Celebrity and activist Richard Gere paid the strikers a visit. Media slowly raised its head and reported (to read additional media reports please visit www.fellowshipinprayer.org).The hunger strikers officially ended their strike following Kofi Annan's public statements and the direct intervention of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with an official visit to the strikers by two representatives bearing a personal letter from Human Rights Chief Navi Pillay. A bottle of orange juice and the promise to investigate the atrocities in Tibet was offered to the strikers at that time. All these activities seemed to occur in a concerted, focused way. Never before had the Tibetan cause achieved such depth at the UN. Was history in the making?

When asked about the progress made with China since

Pillay's letter, Christine Chung, program officer for the OHCHR sent the following response in an e-mail:

> Special Procedures are mechanisms established by the Human Rights Council to investigate human rights issues. The mandates of the special procedures are established and defined by the resolution creating them. Mandate-holders of the special procedures serve in their personal capacity. The independent status of the mandate-holders is crucial in order to be able to fulfill their functions in all impartiality. They make requests for invitations to visit countries, and it is up to the countries to issue these invitations. The High Commissioner remains very concerned about developments in Tibetan areas of China.

In July an intervention for Tibet occurred during the annual Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva before Special Rapporteur Mutuma Ruteere. To initiate a formal investigation inside a country like China, Darfur, Sudan, Bosnia, etc., where reputed human rights violations, atrocities, genocide and torture are reported, official steps called "mechanisms" must be taken both outside, by officially petitioning the UN. Every protest or demonstration, petitioning phone call, news report, personal letter or other declaration of a violation is recorded and is instrumental to mobilize action by the High Commissioner for an investigation. Finally, it is up to the country in question to allow access by a rapporteur like Mr. Ruteere. The country in question, in this case, is China. According to their letter and our follow up inquiry, the OHCHR has requested China's cooperation. What will China do?

It has been fifty-one years since the Dalai Lama left Tibet's border, along with two thousand of his followers. He has never been back. This past summer he celebrated his 77th birthday. Whether retired or not, as the Dalai Lama becomes older and

his generation begins to die, the plight of his people and their culture weighs heavily in the balance.

Admitting that (pre-1959) Tibet's policies and conditions towards its people were "feudalistic" and "change was needed," the Dalai Lama sights some benefits Tibetan Buddhism and culture have brought to the outside world. In the film *Talking with the Dalai Lama,* His Holiness says:

> So, the negative, unfortunate events bring benefit to these people. Now, actually not as a religion, but as a philosophy, it seems nowadays some scientists, especially in the field of the brain or human psychology, scientists working in the field of human emotions. It seems in that field, Tibetan Buddhism has some potential to help them. And we also can learn the results of their research, experiments and explanations.

But as he enters his 78th year, China is building a series of massive dams, diverting three major rivers from Tibet that feed India, Bangladesh and billions in other South Asian lands, to supply water and hydropower to China's major cities. In addition to the devastation to the high Himalayan plateau and its already rapidly melting glaciers, the consequences to Tibetan nomadic life and its wildlife are deadly.

Will 21st century activists and their technology succeed to supplant human rights and environmental violations in China?

Mixing politics with religion, as Tibetan Buddhism instructs, is considered an obstacle to a path of liberation and detachment from worldly matters. However, an advanced Tibetan meditation called *Tonglen* points out that others' suffering (our relatives in former lives) is none other than our own suffering. The target of this meditation is the relationship all living creatures have and the compassionate exchange of others' pain with our cherished joy. How does Tonglen figure in the case of Tibet's self-immolators?

What is the tipping point where empathy transfers to politics and activism, and meditation becomes action?

Would Buddhists consider it sacrilegious to take actions that obstruct human rights violations and ecological destruction in Tibet?

Whether we feel that self-immolation is a bad or a good idea; whether we believe it to be a spiritual or profane thing, the conditions and policies where it is flourishing in China are inhumane and intrepid.

The future of Tibet, its people and culture, are on the chopping block. SJ

John Halpern is a New York based, award-winning documentary filmmaker and artist. His films *Refuge* and *Talking with the Dalai Lama* explore the cultural journeys of East and West and the evolution of Buddhism in today's western culture. He is a cultural activist, creating public, interactive art events over the past thirty-five years, and a meditation instructor. To learn more visit www.mdsfilms.com

Maria Sliwa is an adjunct professor at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, New York University and at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She is founder of Freedom Now News, a human rights news service.

The Politics of Betrayal

KAROLINE LEWIS

When elections heat up, promises of future actions take front and center. A political candidate's character and identity hinge on his or her potential accomplishments. Even though there are ample citations of voting records, previous governance and political experience, it is the hope in what a candidate *will do* that can significantly influence a vote. During campaigns we often hear accusations of broken promises, unmet expectations and general disillusionment—in other words, expressions of betrayal. In the Gospel of John, the story of Judas calls attention to those times when being offended by or disappointed in someone is really more about us, though this may be a bit hard for us to hear.

Judas' story exposes the intricacies of the betrayal that we would rather ignore or to which we rarely admit. Judas reminds us that sometimes the origin of our hurt lies deep within ourselves.

In these next few months, we might do well to listen carefully to those who feel let down by their political candidates or parties. Were you really betrayed by the politician in whom your hope was placed? Or did the person you elected to office end up not being the person you wanted him or her to be? We might also ask when someone slights our confidences, why is it that betrayal is so close at hand as an accusation? What makes the power and potency of betrayal take hold so quickly?

The story of Judas asks us to look long and hard at our own, possibly unreasonable, expectations of the other, and to speak the truth about what stands behind our own disappointments.

Karoline Lewis is a scholar, teacher and author. She holds the Alvin N. Rogness Chair of Homiletics at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. Excerpted from Odyssey Network's: *ON Scripture* and used with permission. www.karolinelewis.com

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